



FEATURE

DUCK RIVER RESERVOIR SET TO OPEN FOR RECREATIONAL USE JULY 17; PIPELINE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

NEWS LOCAL 3 DAYS 6 HOURS AGO



The pipeline route runs along the north side of U.S. Highway 278 (left side in this photo) through Oak Level, then angles through the woods toward the reservoir and dam, visible at top. (W.C. Mann for The Tribune)

CULLMAN - On Tuesday, July 17, the Utilities Board of the City of Cullman will officially open the Duck River Reservoir to recreational activities, including boating and fishing.

Utilities Board Manager Mike Manning told The Tribune that 22 miles of trails around the reservoir will officially open, and that the reservoir itself will be open for pier fishing and to boats and watercraft of 25 horsepower or less.

Duck River Reservoir Manager Tim Scott said that the lake is stocked with Florida Bass and Alabama Bass, which are also known as Spotted Bass. The two populations are being monitored and DNA tested and are expected to cross breed. Other fish have been introduced, as well. The reservoir stock includes (including current fishing limits):

- Florida and Alabama Bass - catch and release only
- Bluegill and Redear Bream - maximum 20 fish of any size
- Black Crappie - maximum 30 fish which must be 9 inches or longer
- Channel Catfish - no limit. This is a young population that is considered not large enough to catch, yet.

Scott insisted that, because the lake and its fish populations are still maturing, fishing limits will be strictly enforced.

Reservoir recreation areas

According to a 2013 plan prepared for the Utilities Board by St. John & Associates, “The landscape surrounding the proposed Duck River Reservoir is comprised of rolling hills that are deeply incised by streams with exposed sandstone cliffs. Land above the reservoir is largely farmland and forest with moderate to steep slopes in the range of 20 percent to 30 percent near the full pool water elevation. Acquired property downstream of the proposed dam features steep, deeply shadowed cliffs and a broad bend in the river surrounding mixed forest and meadow land cover. This rich physical geography and varied landscape result in a scenic setting for the proposed Recreation Area and many potential uses that do not conflict with the overall water supply purpose of the reservoir. Recreation use of the property is proposed to be focused at three primary areas linked by a multiuse pedestrian and bike trail.”

Also from the plan, the areas are:

- Downriver Use Area – “Natural river and canyon landscape downstream of Duck River dam. Uses include environmental education, wheelchair accessible pedestrian access, wildlife observation, outdoor recreation and hiking.”
- Henderson Branch Landing – “Existing cleared meadow and abandoned road bed North of Henderson Branch and adjacent to proposed Duck River Reservoir. Uses include boating, wheelchair accessible pedestrian access and shore fishing, primitive camping, and hiking.” This area will be the primary access point for visitors with boats and other allowed watercraft, with parking provided for cars and boat trailers. According to the plan, “The proposed boat launch features concrete construction and an ADA-compliant courtesy pier for boarding. A wheelchair accessible paved trail meeting ADA standards will lead from handicapped parking to a pedestrian crossing of the reservoir at County Road 1651. This pedestrian crossing will be sized to allow wheelchair accessible fishing while providing room for users of the multi-use trail to cross the reservoir.”
- North Boat Launch – Located at the western terminus of County Road 1651 at the reservoir. “This area is expected to be a secondary access point for boaters due to the limited area available for parking and longer travel distance from US HWY 278.”

The plan also described the multi-use trail:

“A pedestrian and bike trail is proposed to encircle the reservoir and link the recreation use areas. Trail construction would utilize native materials exclusively and follow sustainable International Mountain Bicycling Association and Appalachian Trail Conservancy guidelines that minimize erosion and required trail maintenance. The trail would be constructed so that clearing of trees will be minimized, and no powered vehicle or equine use of the trails will be permitted. Two prefabricated pedestrian footbridges are proposed to be installed along the trail: one crossing the reservoir at the northern extent of the trail near County Road 1669 and the second crossing Duck River within the Downriver Use Area.”

St. John & Associates’ plan included provisions for picnic pavilions, primitive camping sites and interpretive signage along trails. According to Manning, these are possible future developments not included in the current stage of development.

Said Manning, “The original recreation plan that had been submitted to the Corps of Engineers had everything that we could possibly or may possibly do within the restricted area ever, really, because it’s a complicated process to get all that approved by the Corps. And so, some of those things may or may not be added as time goes by, but the reservoir and trails are what will be open at this time.”

Pipeline project ahead of schedule

The Tribune toured the route of the Duck River Reservoir pipeline by air and road, and since then has been speaking to people involved in various portions of the project for an update on progress.

St. John & Associates project engineer Wes Dawsey talked about the pipeline:

“The pipeline is about 68 percent complete and, as far as the schedule goes, we are about 270 days elapsed on the schedule. And it’s supposed to be complete in November--mid-November--so we’re actually a little bit ahead of schedule.

“It’s going pretty smoothly. We’re ahead of schedule, under budget, contractors doing a good job. Hopefully, we’ll continue that way for the next three or four months, and then we’ll be finished.”

According to Dawsey, construction has not been straight through from the water plant to the reservoir. During the wet past winter, crews worked in the driest areas, then, with the onset of warm weather, have gone back to fill in the gaps.

The pipeline project will end at County Road 1640 on the western side of the Duck River Dam, where a separate project will construct a pumping station to move water from the reservoir via the intake tower just north of the dam.

From County Road 1640, the route of the pipeline runs to the southwest where it reaches U.S. Highway 278 in the Oak Level community, near the intersection of the highway and County Roads 781 and 1635. At that point the most visible evidence of the pipeline project can be seen along the north side of U.S. Highway 278, where construction crews are currently laying pipe. The line crosses south of the highway before reaching Berlin, where a stretch of County Road 735 got freshly repaved after pipe was laid beneath it. From there, it works its way to the south side of the water plant.

When complete, the pipeline will be capable of transporting 24 million gallons of water per day, matching the approximate existing flow rate at the plant.

At normal rates, the reservoir pipeline will double the amount of water available to the city water plant. According to Dawsey, this will not double the amount of water coming out of the plant to the city but will act as a backup to the existing system.

Said Dawsey, “The plant will only treat so much water, so you really can’t double the volume coming through it. But what it gives you is a completely redundant source of water, so if you had something happen to the pump station at Catoma--one of the pumps go down and need to be rehabilitated--you could then feed from Duck River to completely run the plant. Or, you know, the real concern is drought . . . now you’ve got another alternate source. You could take half the water from Duck River and half from Catoma, and it would last that much longer.”

Pump station going to bid

The pump station, which will be located on the southwest (downriver) side of the dam and will move water from the reservoir to the water plant via the pipeline, will go to bid soon. According to Manning, construction is expected to take up to a year after that. Water is expected to begin flowing sometime in the latter part of 2019.

Duck River Dam lawsuit still pending

In 2017, after the Duck River Dam was found to be leaking well beyond allowable limits into the dam’s gallery where electronic equipment is housed, the City began investigating the cause. ASI Constructors, Inc., who built the dam, blamed the leakage on a faulty design, while designer CH2M Hill Engineers, Inc. blamed faulty construction. Cullman filed suit against both, not to seek a financial settlement, but to determine the responsible party and make them cover the repairs.

According to Cullman Economic Development Agency Director Dale Greer, the City is still awaiting a judge’s ruling in the case.

For more on the lawsuit, see our previous story at

www.cullmantribune.com/articles/2017/07/28/cullman-utilities-board-files-suit-against-duck-river-dam-engineers-construction

For an earlier update and general overview of the reservoir and dam projects, including a link to the original St. John & Associates recreational use plan, see our story at:

www.cullmantribune.com/articles/2017/08/08/deeper-dive-duck-river-dam

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Stacks of pipe await placement along the pipeline route along U.S. Highway 278 at Oak Level. The route is north of the highway, to the right in this photo, and appears similar to a dirt road in the center. (W.C. Mann for The Tribune)



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